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BAKER DEFENDS BIG WAR WASTE

AS UNAVOIDABLE

Purchases Made at Time Force of 5,000,000 Was Contemplated.

CLAIMS LARGE SAVING Secretary Asserts That Department Made \$4,675,342-831 by Sale of Surplus.

SILENT ON IDLE PLANTS

Aircraft Fiasco Explained as Due to Shortness of Time for Development.

Special Despatch to THE NEW YORK HERALD

New York, Nov. 1, 1920. (Herald Staff Writer.)

Secretary of War Baker today issued a statement defending his administration of the affairs of the War Department from charges of inefficiency, waste and extravagance that have been made in many quarters.

"The War Department has saved over \$4,675,342.831 to the taxpayers of this country through the sale of surplus war supplies and materials," Mr. Baker states in opening the Administration's defense. He also points out that to have a proper understanding of the situation it must be remembered that the Department made its purchases at a time when a field force of 5,000,000 men was contemplated.

"The enormous supplies on hand, he declared, would have been totally inadequate had the war lasted another year. Mr. Baker also asserted that France had purchased goods overseas for \$52,500,000, and in addition, valued customs duties estimated at \$150,000,000, and assumed payment of 150,000 claims arising out of the American occupation and use of installation and lands.

Points to Saving in Europe.

"As a result, therefore, of the work of the United States Liquidation Commission," the statement declares, "the War Department saved to the taxpayers from the sale of surplus war materials in Europe \$972,232,225.32 plus the claims for damages which would have been entered against the Government. Thus the claim that the property which had been sold to the French Government for \$4,000,000, payable in ten years, is entirely erroneous."

No mention is made of the powder plant at Nitro, W. Va., which cost \$70,100,000, produced no powder for \$7,051,000; nor the Old Hickory powder plant at Nashville, Tenn., which cost \$90,000,000, produced nothing, and was sold recently for \$3,030,000, nor of the army camps and cantonments costing \$1,200,000,000.

The department dismisses the aircraft fiasco with the statement "that at the beginning of the war the United States did not seek to build up a large aircraft manufacturing industry. It was necessary to furnish planes in the shortest possible time, consequently most of the planes used by the American aviators were purchased abroad." Thus is described an aviation programme that cost \$1,051,511,985, and despite the fact that it was a failure, it was not delivered at the front prior to the armistice, a single American built fighting plane.

Wastage of Automobiles.

The Secretary of War professes to be indignant because some one charged that 1,000 automobiles of a certain high priced make were parked out in the open for eleven months after the armistice, when the Government only bought seventy-one of that particular make of car. He does not deny that acres upon acres of automobiles of all kinds purchased by the War Department stood exposed to the weather for much more than eleven months after the armistice at the various automobile concentration camps, Camp Holabird, near Baltimore, being a single notable instance of the kind.

Not until this last summer and after the hottest kind of a fire had been built under the department by members of Congress was the distribution of these cars to the various State highway commissions, as provided by law, completed. Some of the machines having stood in the open for two winters, while all the time the State authorities had been clamoring for them.

In this connection, the Secretary makes no mention of the fact that the Department permitted the auto companies to continue to fill their contracts to the extent of delivering 74,017 machines following the armistice, 18,298 in November, 11,477 in December, 16,053 in January, 9,504 in February, dwindling down gradually to 554 in July, 1919, when deliveries were completed; nor does he recall that 29,928 new motor vehicles were shipped to France after the armistice up to as late as the following June for an army that was no longer there.

Of the long list of articles charged as purchased in amounts vastly in excess of army needs the Department's "defense" in the item of branding irons is taken as typical. The admission is made that 146,000 were purchased as charged, but that one iron is serviceable for less than 300 animals, and that animals must be branded once every two months. Both these claims are supported by experienced ranchmen, but even on the Department's statement they had enough iron to brand 59,000,000 animals once, and the total number of horses and mules possessed by the Government at all times during the war, not counting those that died or were otherwise disposed of, was only 573,403.

Work of Liquidation Commission.

Secretary Baker's "defense" is in part as follows:

"When the armistice was signed and the fighting terminated it was necessary to take steps not only to curtail the war output of our factories in America, but also to dispose of the surplus stock on hand. To dispose of the stocks on hand in Europe, the United States Liquidation Commission was organized for the purpose of first disposing of United States surplus war stocks in Europe, and, second, to settle all claims and accounts between allied governments and their nationals on the one hand and the United States War Department on the other. The sales conducted by this commission returned to the United States \$232,028,225. Supplies and equipment to the value of \$672,000,000 were returned to the United States, and pursuant to an act of Congress passed in July, 1919, the Secretary of War, acting through the commission, delivered to the American Red Cross without cost, supplies to the value of \$9,941,851.

"Of the stocks sold in Europe, France purchased goods for \$52,500,000, and in addition to this sum of money, received all claims for customs duties and taxes on property imported into France and sold to the profit of the United States

since April 6, 1917. These customs were estimated at approximately \$150,000,000, and the French Government further assumed the payment of approximately 150,000 claims against the United States Government arising out of the American occupation and use of installations and land.

"As a result of the work of the United States Liquidation Commission the War Department saved to the taxpayers from the sale of surplus war material in Europe \$972,232,225 plus the claims for damages which would have been entered against the Government. Thus the claim that the property which had been sold to the French Government for \$4,000,000, payable in ten years, is entirely erroneous."

"At the termination of hostilities there was a great supply of war material in the United States far in excess of the peace time needs of the army, and for the disposal of this property a sales division was organized in the War Department. This sales division has disposed of supplies and materials of all kinds and to date has sold property which cost the Government \$1,132,067,076 and the return to the United States has been \$529,378,417. Some of the articles thus sold have brought the Government 92 per cent. of their original purchase price.

"The policy of the War Department in selling surplus and reclaimed property is to advertise extensively in business and daily papers throughout the country, and to accept the highest bid of the sale to enable all interested to compete. Every effort is made to allow the public at large to purchase whatever articles are placed on sale, and as far back as August, 1918, the War Department issued instructions that in so far as practicable the surplus material be disposed of to the ultimate consumer and that no firm, corporation, jobber, etc., should be considered until all other channels had been exhausted."

WIRES BAKER TO HALT LEATHER CONTRACT

Bosson Calls Disposal of Surplus Unfair.

While the War Department was issuing denials yesterday of certain of the charges of waste and extravagance that have been made against it, further criticism of a serious nature came to light here.

It was ascertained that George C. Bosson, who is known throughout the country in the leather goods industry and who served as a Captain in the Quartermaster's Corps with jurisdiction over the surplus leather goods of the army, had telegraphed to Secretary Baker vigorously protesting against the recent contract by which the War Department agreed to deliver its entire surplus of saddle and horse equipment to the United States Harness Company, a corporation headed by men who held commissions in the Quartermaster's Corps and who had a great deal to do with the purchasing of the equipment of the very equipment which they are now to receive from the Government.

Declaring that the contract is unfair to the American people and that it was consummated without his knowledge, despite the fact that he was supposed to be in charge of disposition of surplus leather goods, Capt. Bosson has asked Secretary Baker to grant him a personal hearing on the matter.

Capt. Bosson resigned his commission in the Quartermaster's Corps and left the service on October 1. The announcement of the signing of the contract with the United States Harness Company was made about two weeks ago, the War Department at the time issuing a statement in which it asserted that it was very fortunate to be able to dispose of its leather stock in the manner called for in the contract.

The New York Herald was informed yesterday by Charles Tunley of 192 St. Nicholas avenue, Brooklyn,

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who was employed as auditor in a large plant for the manufacture of poison gas, that charges of graft involving an official of that plant had been mailed to Secretary Baker on May 5, and that the War Department apparently had paid no attention to them.

The plant in which Tunley worked had been taken over by the Government with all of its appurtenances for conversion into a poison gas factory, and upward of \$75,000 worth of equipment for which the Government had no use was, according to statements which he made in a letter to Secretary Baker, disposed of by the persons in authority.

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to private concerns. He charges there was no accounting for the funds received, and that when he sought an accounting he was told that the matter did not concern him, as it had occurred prior to his appearance at the plant.

He also stated in his letter to Secretary Baker that one official of the plant charged the Government for items for which he was collecting from a private concern with which he was transacting business, and that when he called his attention to the fact that the sums were being charged up twice, the official replied, "To hell with the Government. This is my rakeoff."

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